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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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Resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

70/1. Implementation of the Bangkok Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific,

Recalling its resolution 68/10, in which it decided to convene the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Integration in 2013,

Welcoming the successful outcome of the Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok from 17 to 20 December 2013,[1]

1. *Endorses* the Bangkok Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific, as contained in the annex to the present resolution;

2. *Requests* the Executive Secretary:

(a) To accord priority to the implementation of the recommendations of the Bangkok Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific;

(b) To assist members and associate members in setting up and supporting the work of the four area-specific expert working groups in accordance with section II, paragraphs 3 and 6(b), of the Bangkok Declaration;

(c) To convene in 2015 the intergovernmental open-ended preparatory meetings for the second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific mentioned in section II, paragraph 3, of the Bangkok Declaration;

(d) To convene the second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific in 2015 to review the progress on the agenda of regional economic integration outlined in section III of the present Declaration, consider the recommendations of the

[1] See E/ESCAP/70/7.

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intergovernmental open-ended preparatory meetings and decide on follow-up actions, as expressed in section II, paragraph 6(d), of the Bangkok Declaration;

(e) To report to the Commission at its seventy-first and seventy-second sessions on the implementation of the present resolution.

Second plenary meeting
23 May 2014

B14-000580

Annex

Bangkok Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific

I. Preamble

We, the Ministers and representatives of members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific attending the Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok from 17 to 20 December 2013,

Emphasizing the need to sustain the region's inclusive and sustainable development to continue to reduce the number of poor people living in absolute poverty from the current levels and to close the development gaps across countries,

Reaffirming the unique role of the Commission as the most representative body for the Asian and Pacific region and its comprehensive mandate as the main economic and social development centre of the United Nations system for the Asian and Pacific region,

Recalling the First Ministerial Conference on Asian Economic Cooperation, which was held in Manila in 1963 under the auspices of the Commission and led to the establishment of the Asian Development Bank,

Also recalling important contributions of the Commission to regional economic cooperation and integration, as highlighted in its resolution 68/10 on enhancing regional economic integration in Asia and the Pacific, and noting other important regional economic cooperation and integration initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region,

Further recalling that the Commission in its resolution 68/10 requested the Executive Secretary to support the convening of the First Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Integration in 2013, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the First Ministerial Conference on Asian Economic Cooperation, and to review the theme study for the sixty-eighth session of the Commission, entitled *Growing Together: Economic Integration for an Inclusive and Sustainable Asia-Pacific Century*,[a, b]

Recalling Commission resolution 69/10 on promoting regional information and communications technology connectivity and building knowledge-networked societies in Asia and the Pacific,

Also recalling General Assembly resolutions 64/186 and 67/194 on building connectivity through the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway and 67/298 on developing cooperation for better connectivity and telecommunications transit routes in the Trans-Eurasian region,

Recognizing the important role of safe, efficient, clean, reliable and affordable transport systems in supporting sustainable economic growth, improving social welfare of people and enhancing regional integration in Asia and the Pacific,

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[a] ST/ESCAP/2629.

[b] See also E/ESCAP/68/22.

Also recognizing that, given the vast land mass, oceans and diversity of the Asian and Pacific region, land-based and sea-based fibre-optic cable networks and satellites play a critical role in developing a seamless regional information space,

Further recognizing that, in the context of economic uncertainties after the global financial and economic crisis and with the rising economic prominence of the Asia-Pacific region in the world economy, the promotion of intraregional trade within Asia and the Pacific can provide enormous opportunities to support economic growth and employment creation in the region,

Reaffirming the imperatives of sustainable development, reducing poverty and inequalities, increasing the resilience of our economies to natural and economic disasters and the effects of climate change, sustainable management of natural resources, enhancing food and energy security, closing the digital divide and reducing development gaps across countries to enhance social cohesion,

Emphasizing that fostering trade, investment, and economic and development cooperation among countries in Asia and the Pacific can create opportunities not only for supporting economic growth, but also for achieving wider developmental objectives,

Noting that improving connectivity with regard to land, river, sea and air transport as well as energy and information and communications technology infrastructure, as well as trade facilitation, is critical to boost trade, investment and the movement of people among countries,

Emphasizing the need to substantially enhance the degree of connectivity in the region, including through investment in transport, energy and information and communications technology infrastructure, and through improvements in trade and transport facilitation,

Recalling Commission resolution 69/6 on the implementation of the Tehran Declaration to promote public-private partnerships in infrastructure development in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development,

Emphasizing the need to develop existing, evolving and innovative national, regional and global partnerships to help members and associate members address the challenges and seize the opportunities associated with growing populations, the demographic dividend, internal and international migration, and urbanization,

Noting the urgent need to increase the availability of and access to financing for regional infrastructure projects, especially those that link least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States with each other and with other economies in Asia and the Pacific, including through facilitating transit transportation to seaports,

Also noting with satisfaction the adoption of the Suva Declaration on Improving Maritime Transport and Related Services in the Pacific,[c] which is aimed at improving the economic feasibility of the provision of regular and predictable inter-island shipping services in the Pacific subregion,

[c] See E/ESCAP/FAMT(2)/6.

(b) The development of seamless connectivity across the region in the areas of transport, energy and information and communications technology, among others, including through the full realization of key regional initiatives;

(c) Enhancing financial cooperation for, among other things, closing infrastructure gaps across countries in the region and exploring the possibility of providing liquidity support;

(d) Increasing economic and technical cooperation to address shared vulnerabilities and risks;

2. *Agree* to pursue the agenda for such cooperation as outlined in section III of the present Declaration as an important step towards realizing a broad long-term vision of an economic community of Asia and the Pacific;

3. *Decide* to create four area-specific expert working groups to take stock of current regional efforts pertaining to economic cooperation and integration, to identify gaps in those efforts, to recommend concrete actions to make progress in each of the four areas listed in operative paragraph 1 above, and to submit their recommendations to intergovernmental open-ended preparatory meetings to be convened for the second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific to take place in 2015;

4. *Agree* to assist countries with special needs, especially least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, in taking advantage of opportunities arising from regional economic cooperation and integration, including, as appropriate, through support to enhance their capacities and through technical assistance;

5. *Invite* members and associate members of the Commission, donor countries, multilateral financing institutions, relevant agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, other intergovernmental and regional organizations, relevant non-governmental organizations, international think tanks and the private sector to provide financial and technical support, within their mandates and core competencies, for the implementation of the agenda for regional economic cooperation and integration;

6. *Request* the Executive Secretary:

(a) To accord high priority to the agenda for regional economic cooperation and integration in the work of ESCAP;

(b) To support the work of the four area-specific expert working groups including the preparation of their terms of reference in consultation with members and associate members and convene the intergovernmental open-ended preparatory meetings for the second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific referred to in operative paragraph 3 above;

(c) To ensure effective coordination with United Nations and multilateral agencies concerned, including relevant subregional technical organizations within their respective mandates and core competencies, in supporting the implementation of the regional economic cooperation and integration agenda;

(d) To convene the second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific in 2015 to review the progress on the agenda of regional economic integration outlined in section III of the present Declaration, consider the recommendations of the intergovernmental open-ended preparatory meetings and decide on follow-up actions.

III. Suggested agenda for regional economic cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific

1. The agenda for regional economic cooperation and integration is aimed at deepening and broadening economic cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific and at moving towards the formation of an economic community of Asia and the Pacific as a long-term goal.

2. Recognizing the important progress achieved by regional groupings and organizations in integrating their subregions, the agenda is designed to support their efforts and further strengthen their contribution as building blocks of a broader regional initiative. For this purpose, the subregional offices of the secretariat could provide support to and liaise with the subregional groupings in their respective subregions within their respective mandates.

3. In order to promote and facilitate opportunities for mutual learning and coordination among regional groupings and organizations, including their sectoral cooperation initiatives, ESCAP could facilitate consultations among such groupings and organizations at the annual sessions of the Commission for the purpose of discussing progress in economic cooperation and integration in ESCAP subregions, sharing best practices and considering ways to enhance economic cooperation and integration among the subregions.

4. It is important to recognize that challenges generally associated with least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, such as small market sizes, geographic limitations and absence of relevant trade infrastructure, reduce the impact of regional cooperation and integration initiatives that are meant to enhance trade, market development and improve economic growth. In order to broaden the access of those countries to regional trade and connectivity, there is a need to implement specific policies that focus on productive capacity-building related to infrastructure development, broadening the economic base, access to finance and providing assistance in overcoming the risks and shocks of entering into a regional trade block.

5. The second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific, which is proposed to be held in 2015, will take stock of the progress made on the agenda of cooperation and integration agreed at the First Ministerial Conference and consider the recommendations of the area-specific expert working groups established by it.

A. Moving towards the formation of an integrated market

6. In order to exploit complementarities between subregions, it is critical to move towards an integrated market of Asian and Pacific economies. One of the four area-specific expert working groups will

explore the possible options for building an integrated market of the Asian and Pacific region in an inclusive and equitable manner.[e]

7. Recognizing the importance of trade for growth and development, members and associate members will strive to foster trade facilitation, bring down trade barriers through cooperation on liberalization, and resist and refrain from protectionism.

8. It is necessary to recognize the importance of migration flows for tackling structural labour demand and supply mismatches across countries and the critical developmental role that remittances play. In this context, it is also necessary to enhance regional consultations to address the protection of rights of migrant workers in accordance with internationally agreed principles, as appropriate, as well as applicable national laws, regulations and policies.

9. Intraregional tourism, which has been growing in Asia and the Pacific as a consequence of the region's progress in raising standards of living and reducing poverty, could help spur development in least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in the region. However, the development of the tourism sector is highly dependent on the existence of efficient, regular and affordable air services connecting recipient and source countries. Regional cooperation in this area is particularly important in order to support these countries in promoting the development of their tourism sectors.

B. The development of seamless connectivity in the region

10. In order to strengthen seamless transport connectivity in the region, it is essential, as appropriate, to implement the Ministerial Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific,[f] and the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase II (2012-2016),[g] the Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation of International Road Transport,[h] the Ministerial Declaration on Transport as a Key to Sustainable Development and Regional Integration,[i] and the Suva Declaration on Improving Maritime Transport and Related Services in the Pacific.[j] It is also important for ESCAP members and associate members that have not already done so, to consider becoming parties to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network,[k] the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network[l] and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports.[m]

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[e] The word "equitable" refers to the principle of special and differential treatment in favour of weaker economies, as included in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

[f] Commission resolution 68/4, annex.

[g] Ibid., appendix I.

[h] Ibid., appendix II.

[i] See E/ESCAP/FAMT(2)/7, chap. I, sect. A.

[j] See E/ESCAP/FAMT(2)/6.

[k] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2323, No. 41607.

[l] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2596, No. 46171.

[m] Commission resolution 69/7, annex.

11. In view of the critical importance of the connectivity agenda, one of the four area-specific expert working groups will take a closer look at cross-sectoral synergies among transport, energy and information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and make recommendations.

12. The Asian and Pacific Energy Forum could address the need to develop energy connectivity by facilitating the evolution of an "Asian energy highway", including oil and gas pipelines and grid connections across borders, to exploit demand-supply mismatches among countries and to further develop a regional energy market and a Pacific regional energy data repository for sustainable energy for all. In view of the importance of energy cooperation for the energy security of the region, the Forum could consider means of implementing a review mechanism for its recommendations. The Forum could also enhance cooperation among energy-producing, transit and energy-consuming countries for the sustainable use of resources.

13. Improved ICT connectivity and the reduction of the digital divide may require enhanced cooperation at the regional and subregional levels in such activities as entering into public-private partnerships, exploring new opportunities emerging from technological innovations and connectivity and supporting the development of regional initiatives for ICT connectivity set forth in Commission resolution 69/10 in order to provide seamless broadband connectivity and reduce the costs of such connectivity for all throughout Asia and the Pacific. Improved regional cooperation on ICT issues could also promote policies that maximize the economic and social benefits of improved ICT connectivity, while mitigating the common challenges and threats raised by new and continuously evolving technologies.

C. Enhancing financial cooperation

14. It is important to recognize the large potential for cooperation in finance in order to develop the region's capital markets and a regional financial architecture to facilitate the mobilization of financial resources for meeting the need for liquidity support and trade finance and to close the infrastructure gaps. One of the four area-specific expert working groups could examine ways and means of exploiting the potential of financial cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, including considering options suggested in paragraph 5(f) of Commission resolution 69/6 on the implementation of the Tehran Declaration to promote public-private partnership in infrastructure development in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development.

D. Increasing economic cooperation to address shared vulnerabilities, risks and challenges

15. One of the four area-specific expert working groups could explore ways and means to foster regional cooperation for addressing shared vulnerabilities, risks and challenges, including the measures discussed in the following paragraphs.

16. The establishment of an Asian and Pacific agricultural research and innovation network could be considered to serve as a regional knowledge network aimed at addressing sustainable productivity increases and encouraging responsible investment in sustainable small-scale farming, agro-industries and rural development.

17. Regional and subregional food banks, such as that created by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' ASEAN-Plus-Three Emergency Rice Reserve, could be strengthened. It is important for countries to share information on food stocks and to facilitate food trade through information-sharing related to sanitary and phytosanitary and other food safety standards, agricultural good practices and trading opportunities.

18. The Zero Hunger Challenge[a] could provide a guideline for regional cooperation in the area of food security. Regional cooperation is particularly necessary to assist countries with special needs, such as least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

19. While increased connectivity facilitates cross-border flows of trade and investment, it also raises the risks of transboundary shocks, which could have serious impacts on social, economic and environmental infrastructure and processes across countries of the region and could lead to systemic failures. In that context, it is important to recognize the role of relevant mechanisms for regional cooperation and coordination and in facilitating the sharing of best practices across the subregions.

20. The role of regional cooperation in ICT and space technologies for the monitoring of hazards and the assessment of vulnerabilities, exposures and risks should be recognized. Regional cooperation, such as through the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development and regional disaster management support systems, such as Sentinel Asia, could also help members and associate members mainstream disaster risk reduction into their development planning, formulate disaster-resilient recovery and reconstruction measures and take into account disaster risks in their land use planning.

21. The pooling of space-based information and ground support as well as communication systems for monitoring and early warning at the regional level should be considered in order to address multiple hazards and cut across geographical boundaries through the sharing of data, information and best practices between national and subregional early warning systems. In this context, it is important to strengthen the Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES).

22. As the scarcity of natural resources is becoming a constraint to the growth of Asian and Pacific economies, there is a need for appropriate and efficient pooling of resources and coordination at the regional and subregional levels with the objective of fostering research and development regarding (a) the conservation of natural resources, including oceans and energy, (b) climate change adaptation and mitigation and (c) the development of environmentally friendly technologies up to the pre-competitive stage. This could be achieved through greater coordination among national innovation agencies in Asian and Pacific countries and through the establishment of regional innovation centres for different core technologies. The role of ESCAP regional institutions, such as the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology, the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development, the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture, and the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization, needs to be recognized in this respect.

[a] See www.un.org/en/zerohunger.

23. A number of members and associate members of the Commission are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as the contamination of freshwater tables by rising levels of seawater, the increased frequency and severity of cyclones, rising of sea levels and the melting of snow caps resulting in flash floods and outburst of glacier lakes. These impacts expose them to the risk of suffering significant damage to their physical infrastructure and productive capacity, which could strain government resources and exacerbate development challenges. Sharing of experiences and best practices among members and associate members to build resilience to the impacts of climate change is thus highly desirable. Members and associate members underline the urgency for enhancing the means of implementation to combat the adverse impacts of climate change in this region in accordance with internationally agreed mandates.